

House Republican leaders seem confident of finishing work by Thursday on a bill intended to slice billions in federal spending — despite facing a flood of amendments, many from conservatives eager to make deeper cuts than GOP appropriators proposed.

Intended to fund the government through Sept. 30, the bill (HR 1) hit the floor Tuesday with \$58 billion in proposed cuts from current spending levels. That number is almost guaranteed to climb as the House considers the measure under an open amendment process, allowing members a clear path for trying to squeeze out deeper cuts.

As many as 700 amendments had been filed before a printing deadline, a GOP appropriator said. Among the amendments likely to be most closely watched are ones from Republican Study Committee Chairman Jim Jordan of Ohio and **John Campbell**, R-Calif., both of whom want to wring more savings out of federal accounts.

Among an initial batch of 400 amendments published early Tuesday, about two-thirds came from Republicans.

“Leadership has been great,” Lynn Westmoreland, R-Ga., said of the support for attempts to amend the bill. “They’re like, ‘OK, knock yourself out.’”

Still, GOP leaders worked to tamp down the amendment enthusiasm in their caucus. Following a series of votes in the afternoon, Speaker John A. Boehner, R-Ohio, asked members to think twice before offering amendments so that “all members have an opportunity to be heard.”

Although the number of amendments sounds daunting, many likely will never be offered and others may be ruled out of order. The rule governing consideration of the bill also gives the GOP leaders latitude to write a new rule that would curb the debate.

On Tuesday, the leaders were seeking agreements to bring “the universe of amendments to a manageable form,” a senior appropriator said.

The surprisingly large number of amendments reflects a desire by Republicans, particularly newer members, to fulfill campaign vows to slash federal spending. Since seizing control of the House in the November election, GOP lawmakers have argued among themselves over just how much they promised voters they would cut from federal spending.

Campbell, a member of the Joint Economic and House Budget committees, is readying two amendments aimed at bringing total cuts in the bill to \$100 billion below current spending.

Dubbed “pledge keeper” amendments in some conservative circles, one would make a 5.5 percent across-the-board spending reduction, excluding accounts for defense, veterans, homeland security and military construction. **Campbell’s** second amendment would make a 3.5 percent across-the-board cut in defense, military construction and homeland security, while continuing to exclude veterans’ programs.

Boehner issued a statement saying the \$100 billion cut promised in the House GOP’s “Pledge to America” was in comparison to Obama’s fiscal 2011 budget request, which has not been enacted. He cited a press release, issued six days after the pledge was published, that said the cut “would save taxpayers \$100 billion this year compared to the president’s [fiscal] 2011 spending request.”

The pledge itself, which was released Sept. 23, says, “With common-sense exceptions for seniors, veterans, and our troops, we will roll back government spending to pre-stimulus, pre-bailout levels, saving us at least \$100 billion in the first year alone and putting us on a path to balance the budget and pay down the debt.”

Jordan’s amendment would also make deeper cuts than the base bill, although not as much as **Campbell** proposes. It would trim an additional \$19 billion to \$20 billion, largely by cutting Congress’ own budget by an additional 11 percent and other non-security spending, except aid to Israel, by an extra 5.5 percent.

Targeted or Sweeping Cuts?

Several Republicans expressed discomfort with the idea of making sweeping cuts instead of more targeted ones.

“Although it seems like across-the-board cuts would be an easy and painless way to do it, we need to be more effective than that,” said Renee Ellmers, a freshman from North Carolina, arguing that approach would leave in place a lot of Democratic legislation that the GOP blames for driving spending.

Local and regional concerns were also coming into play, trumping some lawmakers’ zeal for certain cuts.

Jack Kingston, chairman of the Agriculture Appropriations panel, intends to vote against an plan offered by Paul Broun, a fellow Georgia Republican. Broun, who represents a swath of north-central Georgia, wants to block funding for beach replenishment projects by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. That would impact Kingston’s district, which includes a coastal section with notable beaches.

“There’s pressure to vote for the [bill], but after that, I think we will start looking at things from our own prism,” Kingston said, adding that “when in doubt, people will probably vote to cut.”

Many of the proposed amendments target broad policy areas, particularly those championed by the Obama administration.

Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., chairman of the Labor-HHS-Education spending panel, was working on language that would prevent fiscal 2011 discretionary spending from being used for the health care overhaul (PL 111-148, PL 111-152).

Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., has promised that such an amendment will be added to the bill before it is sent to the Senate. As introduced, the bill would make cuts to programs that were authorized to receive additional funding in the health care law, including community health

centers, the National Health Service Corps and the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant program.

Many of the amendments considered Tuesday focused on defense, with the chamber rebuffing amendments to cut millions of fiscal 2011 spending on Pentagon contracting, military aircraft production and alternative energy research programs.

An amendment by Mike Pompeo, R-Kan., that would have cut \$502 million in funding for procurement and research programs at the Defense Department, was voted down, 72-358. "There is no particular program to which this \$502 million is attributed," Pompeo said. "It goes for innovation, but we all know that innovation occurs in the private sector."

Norm Dicks of Washington, top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, opposed the amendment, arguing that the funding provides a gateway for small businesses to obtain contracts at the Pentagon.

"This is the way to bring small businesses into the Defense Department on a competitive basis, and they do things that the department needs to have done," Dicks said.

A second amendment by Pompeo, rejected 109-320, proposed cutting \$115 million of Defense spending on alternative energy research and development. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., said that the funding is used to help the Defense Department reduce its dependence on fossil fuel.

The House also turned down, 105-326, an amendment by Luis V. Gutierrez, D-Ill., to cut \$415 million from the defense budget for V-22 aircraft production. Gutierrez said the helicopter-airplane hybrid is costly and doesn't meet operational requirements for conditions in Iraq.

An amendment by Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., rejected 207-223, would have redirected \$18.75 million allocated to fund Defense Department boards and commissions to the bill's spending reduction account.

